JFK slayers 'found' on grassy knoll

By Mark Potok
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You may not be too sure what Tom Wilson is showing you when he starts his video, but it's hard to ignore the retired engineer's words.

"You are looking right now into the eye of the assassin of President Kennedy," he says evenly as the tape rolls. "You're looking at a mole on his cheek.

"I can tell you right now, his eyes are brown."

Using sophisticated technologies known as "image processing" and "spectral analysis," Wilson, 59, has spent three years examining some of the most famous photographs and films of the world's most famous assassination. What he claims he's found seems incredible — even to the conspiracy buffs he addressed Friday night in Dallas.

The real killer, he says, is firing from the grassy knoll; on one side of him is another sniper, on the other, a collaborating photographer. The

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president's autopsy photographs are faked; so is a famous photo of Lee Harvey Oswald holding a sniper's rifle. There's a bullet in the president's back never before reported; and there's unreported metal in his head.

"Basic," Wilson says as his video plays. "Basic."

Hardly, retorted several authorities who heard about Wilson's claims to the Dallas assassination symposium. Said Robert Blakey, chief counsel and staff director of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, which probed the killing in 1979: "You know the saying among computer people, 'Garbage in, garbage out?'

"This is garbage."

Agreeing was David Belin, counsel to the Warren Commission, which concluded that the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination was the work of Oswald acting alone.

"It's a series of massive lies," he said. "The man is basically making an outrageous claim."

'Hard evidence' offered

But Wilson, a soft-spoken, hard-of-hearing former U.S. Steel engineer, will not be deterred. Before Friday night, he had never gone public. He is doing so, he said in an interview, "because I have the first real piece of hard evidence."

The evidence, he said, is film — the same film that has been probed for the 28 years since Kennedy's death. Experts from NASA and the FBI, called by the House committee that re-examined the Warren Commission's controversial conclusions, studied it. So have many conspiracy theorists.

But Wilson said he's different.

He worked, in some cases, from copies of copies of photographs. His analysis of the famous Zapruder film of the shooting was done on a copy made on "a $3 tape in a $150 VCR." But Wilson said it doesn't matter.

What he does, he said, is measure frequencies of light that bounce off a photograph or film strip. The light is measured on 250,000 solid-state charge-coupled devices using a 256-shade gray scale; the human eye can perceive only 30 shades of gray. Then his computer program develops a kind of layered picture, sometimes adding lifelike colors.

'Nothing is speculation'

"Nothing is theory," he said. "Nothing is speculation."

The process, he said, is like looking at a photo of a darkened door leading into a hallway, which looks black to the human eye. His method "peels away" the layers of gray, going deeper and deeper and picking up shades invisible to the eye. In the end, with the computer enhancing the grays to make them visible, you will see the man who is standing at the end of the hall.

"Yes, some of these things can be done," said Michael Bove, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor who has worked extensively on image enhancement.

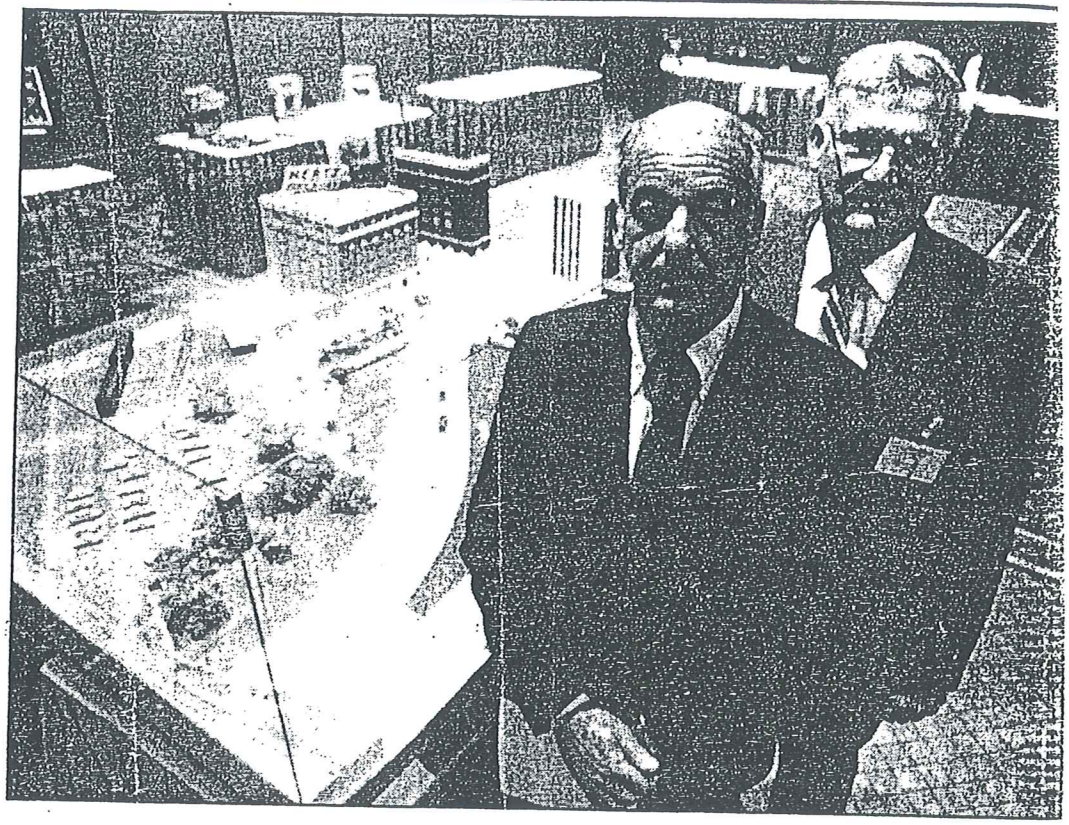
"But the point at which it starts getting to be a little bit less certain technology is when someone shows you a [blurry] picture and says I can identify all the cars, and worse, all the Fords," he said. "Fundamentally, all you've got to go with is what's on the film. Anything else you pull out of there, you're making assumptions about."

Sometimes, watching Wilson's video and listening to him explain its often indecipherable images is like watching the movie, "The Fantastic Voyage," where a miniaturized submarine crew enters the human body. Except in Wilson's case, zooming in on an autopsy photo of the president, you enter the hole in his throat where a tracheotomy was performed.

As you go down, Wilson points out what he says is the bullet hole and its configuration — a pattern he says proves the shot came from the front, meaning it could not have been fired by Oswald, who is supposed to have fired from above and behind.

Similarly, Wilson made these claims:

- Looking at the president's brain by examining one spot in the Zapruder film shows that that shot also was fired from in front. Wilson also claimed to be able to pick out pieces of scalp and brain matter as it flies through the air in a backward arc.
- Probing several autopsy photographs shows a shot in the lower left back and also shows that a picture of the rear of the president's head has been altered. Other conspiracy theorists have maintained that the photos were faked to cover up the direction of the shots.
- A photograph of Oswald at his home holding a sniper's gun is actually of another man with Oswald's face superimposed. Part of the Zapruder film also has been altered.
- A "white puff" on a Polaroid snapshot of the grassy knoll — long identified by some theorists as smoke from a gun — is just that. Wilson's computer program takes you through the halo of smoke, purportedly showing the



Jesse Hornbuckle/Dallas Times Herald

Dr. Cyril Wecht, left, says Tom Wilson has done "beautiful work" in delving into the JFK assassination.

gunman's eye, a mole on his cheek and a rifle's scope; a camera to the gunman's right, operated by another conspirator; and an adjacent puff of smoke, marking where another sniper fired a fifth of a second earlier, but missed. Wilson also claimed he can see the killer's eagle-shaped badge — indicating the assassin wore the uniform of a federal official — and the outline of his name plate.

Name on badge possible

"If I had an original [photo]," he said, "I could probably tell you the name on the badge."

Cyril Wecht, a Pennsylvania forensic pathologist and one-time president of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, has examined Wilson's results and on Friday called it "beautiful work." Wecht — who gave a thunderous speech at the conference referring to conspiracy theorists' attempts to get at the truth as "this glorious quest, this magnificent struggle" — said he endorsed Wilson's work but was unsure if the photographs he worked from were authentic.

Gary Mack, a Texas assassination theorist who nevertheless discounted many of the theories being espoused Friday, said he'd interviewed Wilson for hours.

"He doesn't really know what information the computer is putting into the picture. The computer is just reacting to 'noise,' adding material, altering it, sharpening it. He doesn't really know *what* it's doing."

"It's like ink blot tests," he said. "Magic is a polite term."